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ABSTRACT

The management team concept, which developed in response to increasingly complex problems facing schools, is not only compatible with democratic concepts but has also proved responsive to teacher and parent pressure to redistribute power, broaden decision-making participation, and improve administrative efficiency. The school management team, comprising a cross-section of central office and building level administrators, requires sound leadership from the superintendent, endorsement by the board, and a strong commitment to problem-solving and building trust among all participants. Despite good intentions, obstacles to participatory decision-making can result from incomplete information-sharing and misconceptions concerning levels of participation. Several districts illustrate effective team management practices. The management team approach can be strengthened and diversified by (1) including more women and minority administrators and (2) extending the collaborative work mode to department heads and regular teaching staff. The "second wave" of educational reform aims to restructure schools and reshape teachers' roles towards increased collegiality and decision-making responsibility. As administrator roles are reshaped to allow nonthreatening power-sharing with other staff, the entire school community will benefit from a collaborative learning and working environment. Included are nine references. (MLH)

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TEAM MANAGEMENT

By Margaret Hadderman

Far from being a passing fad, the management team—a formal arrangement enabling the superintendent to consult with other personnel on decisions—has become a permanent feature of American education. The myth of the school leader as a "solitary, benevolent autocrat" is misguided, says Patricia Wilhelm (1984), as principals have always belonged to district management groups and school communities. Likewise, superintendents have come to rely on other administrators' expertise to resolve the increasingly complex problems facing the schools.

Bryce Grindle (1982) notes that the team approach seems "compatible with the best concepts of management, democracy, and open social systems." Moreover, the concept has proved responsive to pressure from teachers and parents to redistribute power, broaden participation in the decision-making process, and improve administrative efficiency.

What is team management?

A *management team* might best be described as "a group whose role is formalized and legitimized and whose purpose is problem solving and/or decision making" (Duvall and Erickson 1981). The school management team usually includes a cross-section of experienced central office and building-level administrators committed to a "structured decision-making process endorsed by the school board and the superintendent" (Lindelow and Bentley forthcoming). Team management offers organizations an opportunity to improve the quality of decisions made and fosters consensus where none was thought possible.

What are the elements of team management?

To become more than a new label for traditional hierarchy, team management requires sound leadership from the superintendent, a good working agreement between the board and its administration, and an organizational model suitable for the district. Above all, team management demands strong commitment to building trust among all participants.

Changes in the district's power structure are largely informal. Success depends on such intangible factors as team members' willingness to be open, trustworthy, and nonjudgmental and the board's and the superintendent's eagerness to share power while retaining final responsibility for team decisions (Anderson 1988).

What are some problems with participatory decision-making?

For all its positive effects on decision quality and staff morale, participative decision-making can lead to frustration if not enough information-sharing occurs within the group (Wood 1984). Other factors hindering group effectiveness are tendencies to avoid conflict-producing discussion, differences between problem-solving actions and beliefs, and misconceptions concerning levels of participation.

To avoid these problems, school districts must clearly communicate the approaches and processes that will be followed, use participatory decision-making at *all* hierarchical levels, and offer appropriate training for group members used to more autocratic approaches. Team members must also learn how to handle dissent, allow sufficient time to make group decisions, and develop an effective self-evaluation process.

What are some good examples of team management?

Several districts that John Lindelow and Scott Bentley describe have developed successful management teams over the past decade. Yakima (Washington) School District's team "resembles a legislative body, with many small groups doing most of the work." Once a group recommends an action, the entire seventy-two member team decides the issue by consensus. The team also prepares salary schedules and uses position papers to facilitate the policy-making process. Yakima's management team is best characterized by its flexibility, responsiveness, and clearly delineated communication channels.

The Rio Linda (California) Elementary School District's forty-member team, while smaller, resembles Yakima's configuration, with small groups doing most of the work and making recommendations to the larger

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team. Unlike Yakima, the Rio Linda team "works toward a solution" until reaching a general agreement (rather than consensus), say Lindelow and Bentley. The keys to Rio Linda's success are well-established communication patterns and solid support from the school board.

Attleboro (Massachusetts) School Department also has an interlocking team structure, but depends more on informal, open discussion than on formalized communication processes. During its formative stage, the team relied heavily on consultants, who held seminars on group dynamics and related team-building strategies. Attleboro's team has worked together so harmoniously that no formal administration-board agreement has been needed.

For additional profiles of successful school management teams, see Anderson (1988).

How might team management be further expanded in school settings?

School districts can broaden the management team by tapping the talents and creative energies of two underrepresented sectors—women and minorities—and by involving teachers in school-based teams. Despite women administrators' special collaborative decision-making and community-building skills, school management teams are overwhelmingly dominated by (white) males.

Ethnic minorities are especially in need of encouragement. At a time when schools are gearing up to serve increasing numbers of black, Hispanic, and poor students, the number of minority teachers and administrators is actually shrinking.

The team approach also can be extended to the faculty. Principals can adopt instructional leadership teams that pool the expertise of administrators, department heads, and teachers. Using the team approach, "critical functions are assigned to those most capable of performing them rather than being centralized in the principal's office" (Glatthorn and Newberg 1984).

Most recently the "second wave" of educational reform calls for structuring the schools and reshaping teachers' roles to allow greater autonomy, status, and decision-making responsibility (Lieberman 1988). In South Bend, Indiana, for example, retiring district-level content specialists are being replaced by teacher specialists. Teacher collaboration is helping to develop leadership potential and may help stem the exodus of experienced teachers from the profession.

Expanding the school leadership team involves more than creating a few new roles or providing extra help for the principal. The idea is to reorganize schools and create a collaborative work mode to replace teacher isolation and break down management/labor barriers (Lieberman 1988). At its best, the management team approach reshapes the administrator's role so that power and authority may be shared with other staff in a nonthreatening way that builds organizational commitment and enhances the entire educational process.

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